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Raborn—Good For CIA

Columnist David Lawrence is wrong, we believe, in criticizing the appointment of Vice Adm. William F. Raborn to head the Central Intelligence Agency.

Raborn is an exceptionally well-qualified man. He is an expert on weapons development, he is well-liked in Congress and in the executive branch where known, and he is a manager of proven skill.

Lawrence's criticism is not personal. He says some experienced, deserving CIA officer would have been more effective as director than someone brought in from outside, as Raborn was. And he is probably right. The admiral will no doubt need considerable "schooling" to familiarize himself with CIA's operations, which are always described as sensitive and complex.

But direction of the CIA should never be given to an insider if anyone else of ability can be appointed — for these reasons.

Nobody knows much about the organization or even how much it spends. But occasionally when something does become public knowledge, it is cause for blushing. As:

—The CIA's role in the Bay of Pigs operation, including its blunder in giving

strong support to Cubans who were regarded as reactionaries by much of the population on the island.

—The harebrained effort, only recently revealed, to ruin a shipment of Cuban sugar to Russia in 1962 by putting chemicals in it to make it tasteless. President Kennedy, reportedly outraged, had the sugar impounded despite Russia's angry and unknowing remonstrances.

What if the chemicals had been harmful to life? What a petty, demeaning thing to do in the name of a great nation!

The United States will continue to need the CIA so long as the Cold War lasts. We need all the information we can get on the warmaking capabilities, the plans and the problems of our potential enemies. And much of the CIA's work must remain secret.

But long-time professionals in any bureaucratic organization develop a tendency to think their outfit can do no wrong. The men of the CIA are no different.

Whether he is less effective or not, an outsider appointed to run CIA will have a tendency to arch his brows at some of the things he learns, and that is a very good thing.